Bizarre Biblical Stories
HNZ 207 T/TH 10:50AM-12:05PM
Office Hours: By Appointment

FWIS 177
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The Hebrew Bible has acted as an important foundational book for western culture, and has served as the basis for Judaism and Christianity. Included within this book are some incredibly bizarre accounts, dealing with topics such as fratricide, seduction, and magic. This course will examine some of these stories, primarily from the books of Genesis and Exodus. We will see how these stories have been interpreted, and have been afforded meaning, throughout the ages.

We begin with the recognition that the Hebrew Bible is a complex collection of writings composed by past cultures informed by ideologies and modes of living that are radically different from our own. Despite this, the influence of this corpus of literature permeates many aspects of contemporary religious communities as well as western culture in general. We will deal with questions of history and archaeology, and with questions of meaning – what the biblical text meant to its ancient readers, and what meanings it has today. All texts will be read in English translation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This is a content-based course that meets the requirements for distribution credit.
It is also a First-Year Writing Intensive Seminar (FWIS), which focuses on writing skills.

As a content-based course, it has the following aims:

1. Analyze the structure and meaning of the Hebrew Bible in its present (canonical) form, in order to enable the student to recognize and understand the major genres of biblical literature.
2. Explore the important themes and ideas of the Hebrew Bible, such as cosmogony and theodicy, as well as concepts such as nationhood and the construction of social identity.
3. Describe various interpretative strategies developed for both traditional exegesis and for modern biblical criticism, the intellectual histories of these strategies, and their general impact.

As a FWIS course, it has the following aims:

1. To enhance understanding of the central place of writing and communication in the learning process and in academic life.
2. To learn strategies for analyzing, synthesizing, organizing, and responding to college-level materials and improve the ability to communicate correctly and effectively in writing and in speech, taking into account audience and purpose.
3. To become comfortable with writing as a process and learn strategies—for instance, prewriting, outlining, and revision-- for working through that process.
4. To learn the appropriate use of the work of others and practices of citation.
5. To learn to articulate oral arguments and to respond productively to arguments of others.

REQUIRED TEXTS

The Jewish Study Bible, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford, 2004). [abbreviated JSB]. In addition to informational articles that will be read from this volume, the bible translation within it will be the "primary text" in use throughout the course.

Other texts will be made available through Owl-space.

REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

You are expected to come to class having done the readings listed for the day of the class. Each unexcused absence after three (3) will result in one (1) point per missed class deducted from your overall grade. Grading will be as follows:

Reading Responses	=	20%
Film Notes	=	10%
Story Presentations	=	20%
Term-Paper Outline	=	5%
1st Draft of Term-Paper	=	10%
Final Term-paper	=	35%

For reading responses: Since this is a writing intensive course, you will regularly be expected to actively engage with the reading assignments through written responses. These should be typed, double spaced, and should be about one-half page in length. They should be sent to me as Word attachments via e-mail, by midnight (12:00AM) the night before class, **at the very latest**. NO LATE RESPONSES WILL BE ACCEPTED. These will be graded as either (+) or (-). The response should be directly related to the reading and can contain any question(s) or comment(s). In addition to getting you to mentally process material through the medium of writing, these responses will give me a sense of what you're interested in and what is confusing to you.

For film notes: We will be viewing four short documentary films together in class. In the spirit of FWIS, it should be noted that writing goes beyond formal composition; the purpose of the film notes is to get you to become active viewers and note-takers rather than passive consumers. Notes will act as a spring-board for in-class discussion, and they will be collected after class.

For story presentations: One of the goals of this course as a FWIS is to improve the ability to communicate, not only in writing, but also in speech and through other media of formal presentation. In this regard, each student will be assigned one bible story to present to the class during the semester. These presentations should be about 15 minutes in length. Examples of presentations include (but are not limited to): an oral recounting, a power-point with images, a poster presentation, or a song composed by the student. Be creative. What I do NOT want is for you to simply re-read us the story. Remember, these will be graded.

For the term-paper: This will be an 8-10 page typed, double spaced research project on any of the stories and/or aspects of the Hebrew Bible that we are covering in class. Individual meetings will be arranged early in the semester to determine specific topics, and one class session will be a library visit to walk you through the research process.

One of the purposes of FWIS is to help new students understand the Rice Honor Code and, more explicitly, to teach students the rules of paraphrasing and scholarly attribution, and the appropriate uses of different types of evidence. Accordingly, FWIS instructors will take an educational approach to transgressions of these rules and respond to errors in these areas foremost as issues for grading and opportunities to correct errors, rather than as instances of academic dishonesty. At the same time, all FWIS instructors retain the authority—and are encouraged—to treat instances of repeat or egregious violations as matters for the attention of the Rice Honor Council.

If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me as soon as possible in order to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.

The syllabus for this course is subject to change over the course of the semester. I will make updated syllabi, as well as any changes available. Please make sure that you have access to your university e-mail and to Owl-space, and if you do not, see technical support immediately.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

T 1/14 Introduction: Overview of the Course

TH 1/16 *Modern Biblical Scholarship*
Reading: Berlin and Brettler, "The Modern Study of the Bible," in JSB, pp. 2084-2096

T 1/21 *The Bible and Archaeology*
Film: The Bible's Greatest Secrets

TH 1/23 *Traditional Interpretation of the Bible*
Reading: Kugel, "The Rise of Ancient Interpreters"

T 1/28 Individual meetings to discuss term-paper topics (please look over the syllabus and come to the meeting with ideas in mind).

TH 1/30 Library visit

T 2/4 *The Creation Narrative and Adam and Eve*
Reading: Kugel, "Creation of the World"; Genesis 1-3 (JSB, pp. 12-16)
Student Presentation 1

TH 2/6 *Cain and Abel*
Reading: Kugel, "Cain and Abel"; Genesis 4:1-16 (JSB, pp. 18-19)
Film: Cain and Abel

T 2/11 *Noah and the Flood*
Reading: Kugel, "The Great Flood"; Genesis 5:28-9:17 (JSB, pp. 21-25)
Student Presentation 2

TH 2/13 *The Tower of Babel*
Reading: Kugel, "The Tower of Babel"; Genesis 11 (JSB, pp. 29-30)
Student Presentation 3

T 2/18 *The Call of Abraham*
Reading: Kugel, "The Call of Abraham"; Genesis 12-15 (JSB, pp. 30-36)
Student Presentation 4

TH 2/20 *The Binding of Isaac*
Reading: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* pp. 6-18; Genesis 22 (JSP, pp. 45-47)
Student Presentation 5

T 2/25 *Jacob and Esau*
Reading: Kugel, "Jacob and Esau"; Genesis 25:19-28:9 (JSB, pp. 53-58)
Student Presentation 6

TH 2/27 *Jacob's Wrestling*
Reading: Kugel, "Jacob and the Angel"; Genesis 29-33 (JSB, pp. 59-69)
Film: Jacob's Ladder

T3/4 SPRING BREAK

TH 3/6 SPRING BREAK

T 3/11 *Joseph in Egypt*
Reading: Kugel, "Joseph and His Brothers"; Genesis 37, 39-41 (JSB, 74-76, 78-84)
Student Presentation 7

TH 3/13 *Judah and Tamar*
Reading: Kugel, "Judah and Tamar"; Genesis 38 (JSB, pp. 76-78)
Student Presentation 8
Discussion of outline

T 3/18 *Jacob and his Sons*
Reading: Kugel, "Jacob and Sons"; Genesis 47:28-50:26 (JSB, pp. 94-101)
Student Presentation 9

TH 3/20 *Moses in Egypt*
Reading: Kugel, "Moses in Egypt"; Exodus 1:1-4:17 (JSB, pp. 107-113)
Student Presentation 10
Outline due (sent to me as a Word document via e-mail, by midnight)

T 3/25 *"Bridegroom of Blood" and the Plagues*
Reading: Kugel, "The Exodus"; Exodus 4:18-23, 7:8-11:10 (JSB, pp. 113, 117-125)
Student Presentation 11

TH 3/27 NO CLASS

T 4/1 *The Exodus*
Reading: Kugel, "The Exodus pt. 2"; Exodus 12-15:21 (JSB, pp. 125-138)
Student Presentation 12

TH 4/3 MIDTERM RECESS
1st draft of term-paper due (sent to me via e-mail, as a Word document, by midnight)

T 4/8 *Covenant*
Reading: Kugel, "A Covenant With God"; Exodus 17-19 (JSB, pp. 142-148)
Student Presentation 13

TH 4/10 *The Ten Commandments*
Reading: Kugel, "The Ten Commandments"; Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5:6-21 (JSB, pp. 148-152, 375-378)
Film: *The 10 Commandments*

T 4/15 Individual sessions to discuss presentations and term-papers

TH 4/17 *The Golden Calf and the Tabernacle*
Reading: Kugel, "Worship on the Road"; Exodus 31:1-11, 32:1-33:11 (JSB, pp. 181-182, 183-187)
Student Presentation 14

T 4/22 *Moses' Farewell and Death*
Reading: Kugel, "Moses Blesses the People"; Deuteronomy 31-34 (JSB, 437-450)
Student Presentation 15

TH 4/24 *Concluding Remarks*
Reading: Kugel, "After Such Knowledge"
Final draft of term-paper due (sent to me via e-mail, as a Word document, by midnight)